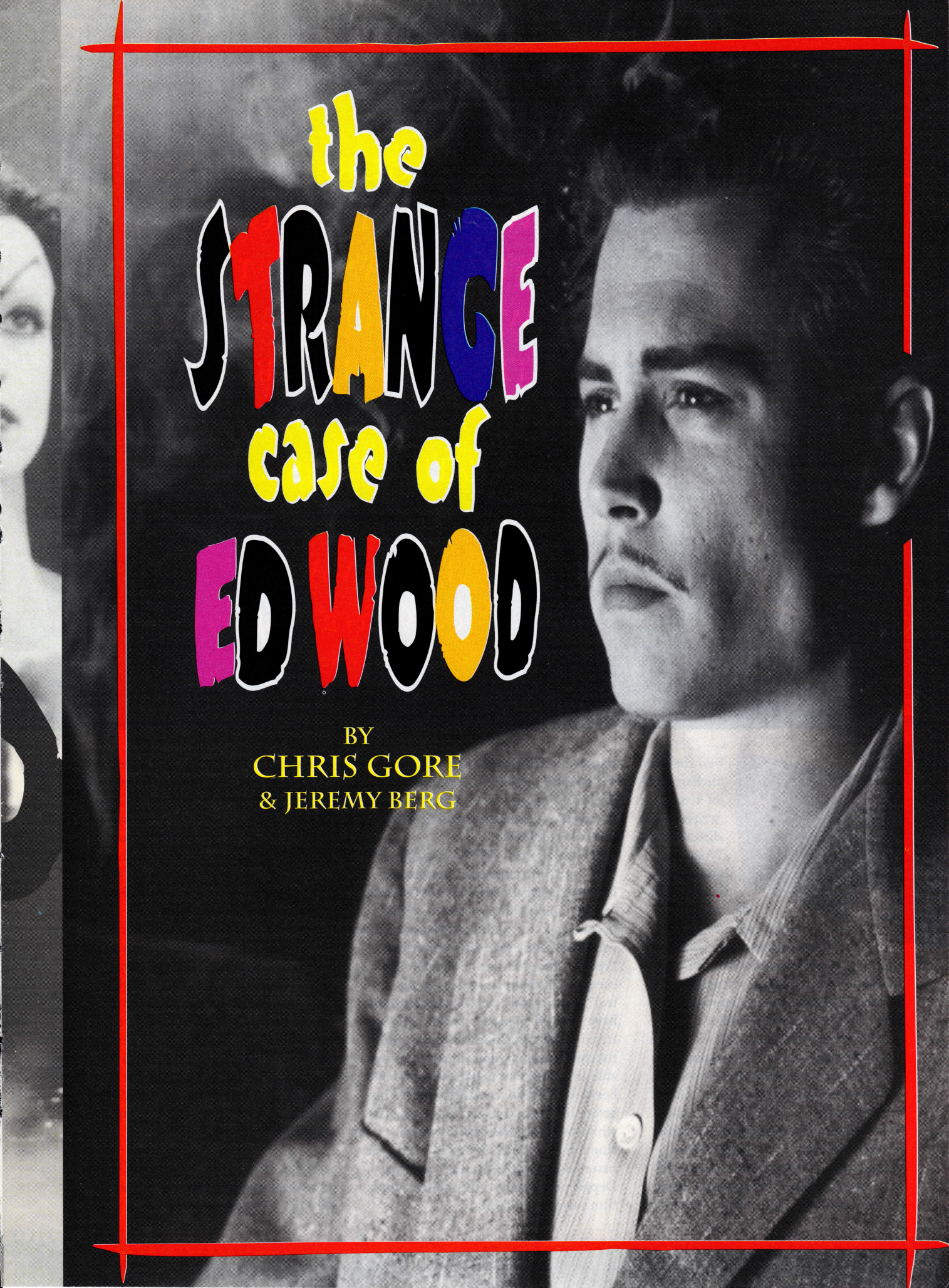
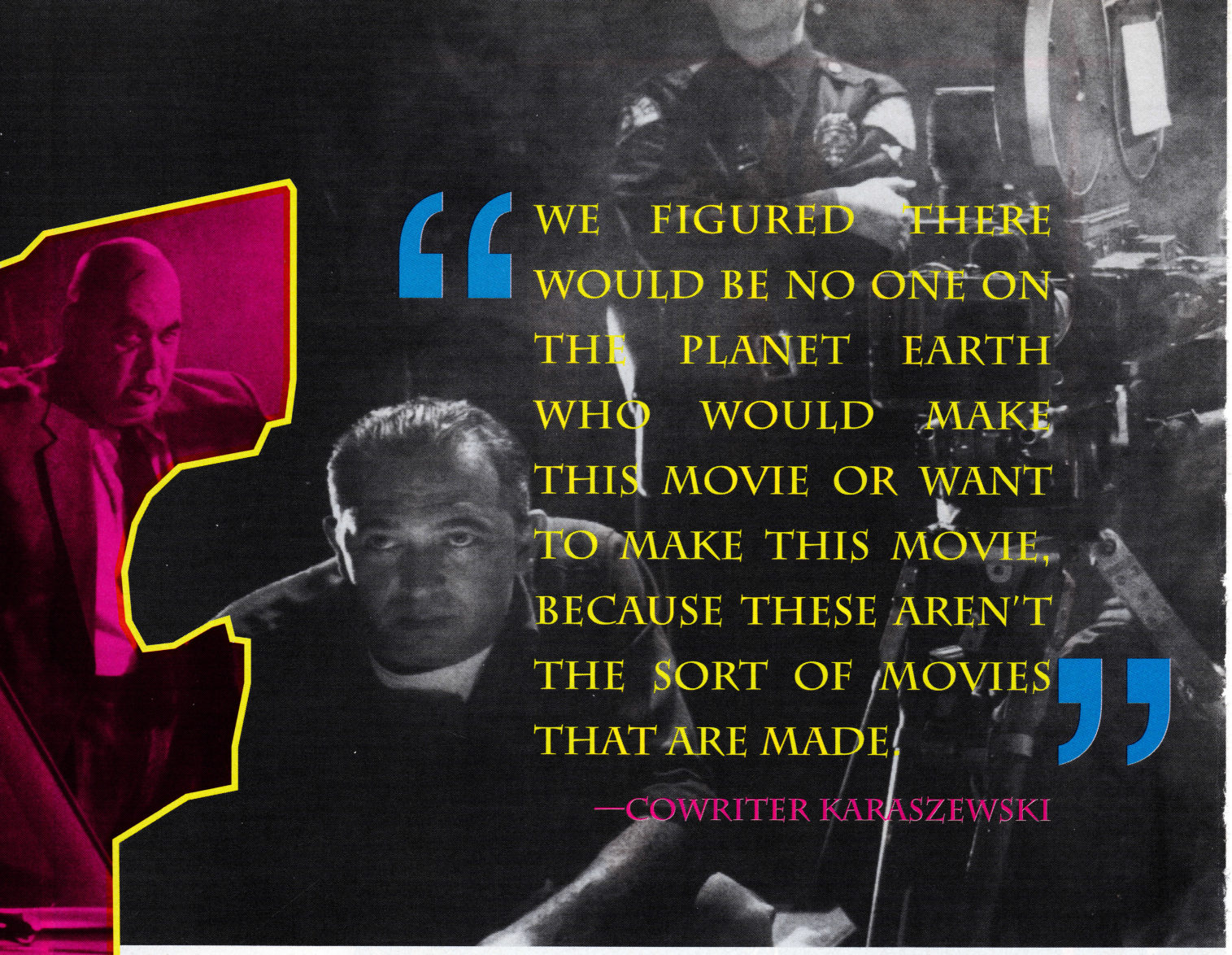

ED
or
JOHNNY


the
STRANGE
case of
ED WOOD
BY
CHRIS GORE
& JEREMY BERG



"WE FIGURED THERE WOULD BE NO ONE ON THE PLANET EARTH WHO WOULD MAKE THIS MOVIE OR WANT TO MAKE THIS MOVIE, BECAUSE THESE AREN'T THE SORT OF MOVIES THAT ARE MADE."

—COWRITER KARASZEWSKI

Even the most diehard fans of actor, writer and director Ed Wood Jr. would agree that he made bad movies. Really bad movies.

Wood's films are so bad that they are actually fun to watch. Fun in the same kind of way as witnessing someone tripping on the sidewalk or vomiting upon exiting a roller coaster, or like the simple pleasure of viewing a painful traffic accident. You know, *that* kind of fun. Ed Wood's best-known travesties of cinema spanned the classic schlock film era of the '50s and early '60s: ***Glen or Glenda***, ***Jailbait***, ***Bride of the Monster***, ***Night of the Ghouls***, ***The Sinister Urge*** and, the most infamous of all, ***Plan 9 From Outer Space***. But the ultimate honor is now due this master of mediocre movies. ***Ed Wood***, the motion picture, is a delightful biopic that pays loving tribute to the man who is commonly referred to as the worst director of all time.

While the real Ed Wood grappled with his own transvestite tendencies in his biographical film ***Glen or Glenda***, Johnny Depp had to contend with becoming Ed, which involved the actor's rumored frequent testing of various types of lingerie that he wore under his everyday clothing in order to "get a feel" for the part. Depp's research must have paid off in spades because his portrayal of Wood is both hilarious and touching. Depp seems all too comfortable in those pink angora sweaters and heels. Johnny nonchalantly directs his actors in re-creations of Wood's worst while wearing full makeup without batting a fake eyelash. Wood himself, who passed away in 1978, might approve of Depp's performance, if it weren't for the film's overall slickness.

Though celebrity film director Tim Burton seems poised to receive most of the credit for the success of this strangely dark, funny yet moving biopic, the true brainchilds behind ***Ed Wood*** are the film's screenwriters, Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski. The writing team behind such crap as ***Problem Child*** have surprisingly crafted a wonderful Horatio Alger tale. They've even avoided the conventions of the genre by providing this biography film with a happy ending. Considering that the real Ed Wood had drug problems and died penniless, before his films' glorious rise in the encyclopedia of kitsch, this is a break from the norm. FILM THREAT cornered Scott and Larry for the lowdown on Ed's inception, color versus black-and-white, and the virtues of *comfortable* women's clothing.

MEET THE BAD BOYS OF BIO

Can there really be two people on the face of this Earth who can claim that



Driven director Ed Wood (Johnny Depp) in his element.

their chance meeting was due to Herschell Gordon Lewis? Well, this just happens to be the case with the authors of ***Ed Wood***, Larry Karaszewski and Scott Alexander. One day while in line to check into the dorm rooms at USC, somehow these two strangers began a discussion on the Godfather of slasher flicks, and thus a great writing team was conceived.

FILM SCHOOL MANIACS

It was their senior year at USC when the two decided it was time to think about writing a movie. While driving to South Bend to see Larry, Scott was transfixed by a lawsuit where a high school kid was suing his school district. Scott explains that "a bunch of kids had been crawling on the roof of the school gymnasium, trying to vandalize it, kicking holes in things and spray painting it, and they had fallen through a glass skylight, and one kid hit the floor and was paralyzed. He turned around and sued the school district, claiming that this was an unsafe roof to climb on at two in the morning. Larry and I started talking about it, saying that this can be made into a comedy, and we extrapolated from this and turned it into a story about a thief robbing a suburban home owner's house. He falls through the roof and then sues the home owner for negligence. We simply thought, *Wouldn't it be fun to write a script?* We had no ulterior motives at all. It was just a goofy thing to do, and we wrote the script about a week after graduating and then sold it to 20th Century Fox." Fresh out of film school and these two Herschell Gordon Lewis fans are already sharing office space on a major studio lot.

PROBLEM CHILD BLUES

While their first script languished in development hell at 20th Century Fox, their second script had the good fortune of being made. Although it wasn't ***Citizen Kane,*** their sophomore script,

WRITERS' PROFILES

LARRY KARASZEWSKI

Larry's your typical Midwest kind of guy who got involved with making movies at an early age. Born and raised in South Bend, Indiana, Larry picked up his first Super 8 camera at the age of ten. He worked on a "Second City for young kids"–type TV show called ***Beyond Our Control***. After that, he decided to move to Los Angeles, go to film school and start writing.

SCOTT ALEXANDER

Scott, on the other hand, has far less culture than Larry. "I have lived in Los Angeles every minute of my life. I'm one of only seven people alive who can make that claim. I've never lived anywhere else. Went to USC, local school, married a local girl from the Valley, started making Super 8 movies in high school."

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Problem Child, did happen to be the most profitable film of 1990, though you wouldn't know it from Larry and Scott's profit statements, which they would be pleased to show you.

Problem Child wasn't conceived as a dumb kiddie comedy. Scott explains that "it wasn't supposed to be a kids' film. The genesis for the movie was that there were all these baby-loving movies of the mid-'80s: ***Baby Boom***, ***Three Men and a Baby***, ***For Keeps***, etc. Meanwhile, Larry and I were thinking, *All these movies are saying how wonderful these little children are, how they change and enhance people's lives*. We wanted to do a movie that was the antidote to that, saying that kids are a pain in the ass." Basically the truth.

BAD IS GOOD

We all know that ***Problem Child*** wasn't necessarily what we at FT call high art, but so what—the film grossed gangloads of cash. Very hated by the critics, but incredibly successful. "*Entertainment Weekly* referred to it as a 'freak hit,' " explains Scott. "A real backhanded compliment." The next year was spent turning down an endless amount of kiddie garbage films like ***Cop and a Half***. But at least they were getting offers, and to a writer, any offer is a good offer.

LARRY DOESN'T TYPE—EVER!

With every writing team there is always the issue of who is going to do the typing. With the case of Scott and Larry, the answer is always the same: Scott types, Larry reclines. Plain and simple, no fuss, no fight.

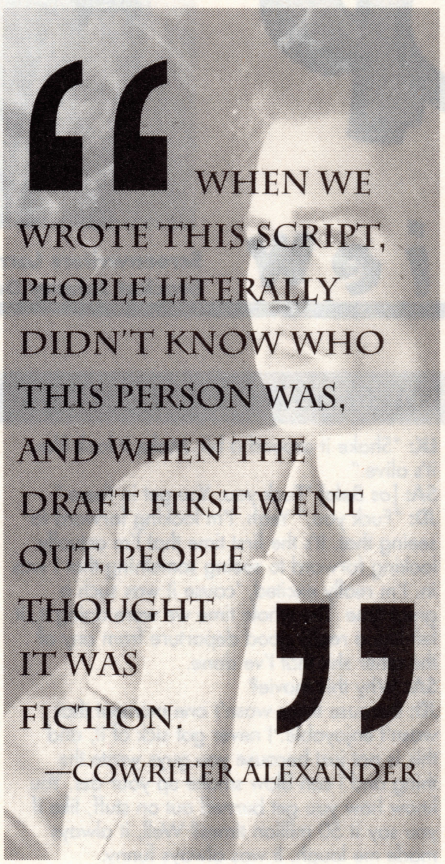
BIOPIC FOR A LOSER?

It all started with Scott's proposal for an Ed Wood film back in his sophomore year at USC. "It was a preproduction class about getting grants for projects—you'd put together a whole proposal to make a movie, and my package was for a movie called ***The Man in the Angora Sweater***," Scott explains. "I actually faked letters from Lyle Talbot and Vampira, saying that they would be happy to cooperate with the project."

Larry goes on to say that "Scott's proposal was for a documentary on Ed Wood, but we always talked about what a great biopic it would be. But we figured there would be no one on the planet Earth who would make this movie or want to make this movie, because these aren't the sort of movies that are made."

But Ed Wood? A man whose films have been called the worst films ever made? What was their initial reaction to these films? "Boredom," both Larry and Scott answer. Larry claims, "I've seen his films a thousand times apiece since, and you begin to appreciate them the more you watch them. There's a difference between Ed Wood–style filmmaking and other people who make those kind of movies in the sense that Ed had a real passion. When you watch the movies, you can tell that the guy behind the camera truly believes 100% in what he's doing." Scott believes that "the movies are almost more interesting to watch now than they were then because now people know more about Ed. Once you know about the cast and all their screwy stories and Ed's troubles making these movies, it allows you to read more into the films, it gives them more context."

Do these guys have a favorite picture? Larry says, "***Glen or Glenda*** has always been my favorite. It is a mondo piece of filmmaking. There's all of the jumping back and forth from the guy telling the story and then the dramatization of a transsexual's nightmare. It's all really good stuff."



PITCHING WOOD

By this time Scott and Larry have somewhat of a personal connection to Ed Wood in that their ***Problem Child*** films were almost as hated as Ed's films were. Some of the endless negative reviews read "script wasn't written, it was fingerpainted, or written by a demented proctologist." With the sequel critics even stated that "the end of the world is near if ***Problem Child 2*** is a sign."

Larry explains what his state of mind was like after the nonstop assault of their first features. "At this point we knew what it was like to be hated for what you do. We knew that it took just as much hard work and energy to make a bad movie as it does to make a good movie, so we were able to look at Ed Wood from a different angle. We were able to look at the possibility of doing an Ed Wood movie and not making fun of Ed Wood the way most traditional things written about Ed up to this time had done. What's interesting is that since Ed Wood was so on the fringe of Hollywood, the story became one that was more about someone who wants to be a film director than about a guy who actually is a film director."

But did Hollywood remember who Ed Wood and his crew were? And did they care? Scott comments that "when we wrote this script people literally didn't know who this person was, and when the draft first went out, people thought it was fiction. People thought everyone was made up except Bela Lugosi."

Larry recalls their meeting with British director Jonathan Lynn (***My Cousin Vinny***). "We were walking out of the meeting, and somehow it slipped that it was a true story and he couldn't believe it. He kept saying, 'You're kidding me.' " Kind of figures when you think about how little most people in Hollywood truly know.

MEETING TIM BURTON

Initially Larry and Scott thought this would be a great project for their old film-school buddy Michael Lehman (***Heathers***). Larry figured they would approach it in a very nonformal way. He explains their viewpoints at the time

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

THE JOHNNY DEPP interview



Screenwriters Larry Karaszewski and Scott Alexander bracket Johnny Depp on the set of *Ed Wood*.

A FILM THREAT EXCLUSIVE CHAT

Forget the notion that Johnny Depp is too busy for interviews because he's shooting *Don Juan De Marco and the Centerfold* with Marlon Brando. Shove *Ed Wood* screenwriters Larry Karaszewski and Scott Alexander into Johnny's trailer, mix up a few cocktails and (most importantly) lob in a tape recorder and BOOM, instant masterpiece. The following contains gags, thoughtful musings, four-letter words and a surprise guest star. In addition to the cocktails and fake crab, the trailer, decorated by Depp's girlfriend, model Kate Moss, featured colored silks and flickering lamps, evoking a Moroccan opium den.

SCOTT ALEXANDER: Let's jump right in. In ***Ed Wood***, you and Sarah Jessica Parker had to re-create scenes from Ed's movies. You had to act badly on purpose.
JOHNNY DEPP: Yeah. It wasn't difficult at all.
LARRY KARASZEWSKI: No?
SA: Doesn't it go against everything you've learned?
JD: No problem at all.
LK: Exactly. Let's go back to *21 Jump Street*.
SA: Hey!
JD: Way before that. I learned how to act badly way before then. Yeah. No, it was actually fun. It's nice to do things badly, as you can see from my film credits.
SA: You guys were doing a real literal re-creation, which was so funny. The arm movements and the head turns.
JD: Right.
LK: It wasn't really acting badly, it was more like imitating bad acting to a perfect degree.
JD: What I can't wait to see is that stuff we did from ***Bride of the Monster*** in the swamp.
SA: The octopus?
JD: Yeah, I love that whole scene. The way I was saying to Bela, "Now, you're gonna get in there and..."
LK: "Shake it around a bit. Make it look like it's alive."
SA: [*as Bela*] "Fuck you. You get in there."
JD: "Fuck you." Yeah, I'm looking forward to seeing that. It's the first time that I'm actually looking forward to seeing something that I was in. I'm really excited, 'cause it was such a great time. The whole time we were doing it, it felt like a really good departure from any of the other shit that I've done.
SA: Why this movie?
JD: Because there wasn't one moment that wasn't enjoyable. I never got sick of it, and this is not just because you guys wrote the thing and I can blow smoke up your ass. You know how you get burned out on stuff, like if you say it 50 million times? Well, it always made me laugh. It was always funny.
LK: The only thing that got changed from our script to the movie was that you decided that Ed shouldn't swear.
JD: I just felt that he wouldn't. I felt like the most offensive word that could fly out of mouth would be like "darn" or something. I just thought it was a good twist. I didn't want him to curse.
SA: Your theory makes sense.
[*We all pour ourselves drinks.*]
LK: We hear you're getting Ed a star.
JD: Yeah, I'm trying to get Eddie a star on the Walk of Fame, 'cause it's important. And someone said, "Well, you know, there's one next to Bela that's available."
SA: Whoa! That is amazing.
JD: It would just be fucking perfect.
SA: A star for Ed would be really cool. Who would make this happen?
JD: Well, here's the thing. There's one guy in Hollywood. His name's Johnny Grant.
LK: He's the mayor?
JD: Mayor of Hollywood: self-appointed.
SA: Dictator.
LK: Let's overthrow Johnny Grant. I see no reason why Johnny Depp can't be the Mayor of Hollywood.
JD: I aspire to be the Mayor of Hollywood. [*He shrugs.*] Eh, I'm just the mayor of my own life, man. I'm the mayor of my own future.
LK: The only person I heard that couldn't get a star was Prince. He wanted to use that symbol instead of his real name and they said, "Fuck you."
JD: That thing looks like an egg beater.
LK: Back to Ed Wood. How much did you know about him before you got involved with the project?
JD: I knew the films. I knew ***Glen or Glenda*** and I obviously knew ***Plan 9***. His major epic. But yeah, I'd heard about him. Actually, from John Waters.
LK: He's a big fan.
JD: John looks like Ed Wood.
SA: With the thin moustache.
JD: Yeah, like a kind of stretched-out Modigliani version of Ed Wood. John has the same sort of energy that I assume Ed had... that I made Ed have in the movie.
LK: Waters is actually the first person we went to with the project. We had the same agent. So we wrote a letter to him saying, "Would you be interested?" But he was getting ***Serial Mom*** going and said, "Well, you know, I love this subject matter, but I can't do it right now."
SA: "I've got to be mainstream. I've had 20 years of being a weirdo."
JD: Yeah.
LK: Exactly. Too strange for John Waters.
JD: The way I heard about the project was, I was sitting home one night, when the phone rang, and it was Tim. He was real secretive: "Johnny, what are you doing?" And I said, "Hanging out, sitting around." He goes, "Can you meet me somewhere?" I said, "Yeah, sure. Where?" He said, "How quickly can you get to the Formosa Cafe?" I go, "20 minutes." So I went there. He was sitting at the bar. We sat and had a beer. And he said, "I got this project. It's gonna happen. I really wanna do it

next. It's about Ed Wood." And within, I mean, let's say he called me at 8:00, and I was at the bar by 8:20. By 8:25 I was committed. Completely committed. It was like, "Yeah, whatever you wanna do." When I told John Waters I was gonna play Ed Wood, he was so excited. He was so happy. So I told him Tim was gonna direct—and he said, "That's the only fucking person who can get it made! That's the only person in the world who can get that film made. I'm so happy for you. I'm so happy."

SA: Tim really wanted you. He saw you so firmly in the part, he couldn't even imagine if he had to make it with someone else.

JD: Wow. I would do anything Tim wanted me to. You know—have sex with an aardvark... I would do it. I love Tim. I love working with him. We have a strange connection. It's weird. Neither one of us is a great talker. Neither one of us finishes a sentence properly. Tim is worse than me at that. Somehow we understand each other when we work together.

[*An assistant director walks in.*]

AD: We're about five minutes away.

JD: What are we doing?

AD: Scene 87. Your close-up.

SA: Oh, Scene 87! Okay.

AD: Marlon will probably not come in for off camera on this one.

JD: No, I don't need him. That's all right. You know, people mentioned to me, "So you're working with Brando?" I said, "Yeah." They said, "Is he actually gonna be there?" I go, "What do you mean?" They said, "Well, we've heard that he's invented this system where he actually isn't even there. It's a hologram." But you'd be surprised—he's really fuckin' great. He's a real trooper.

[*The A.D. gives up and leaves.*]

SA: ***Ed Wood*** is the only movie you've done where you portray a real person. Did you approach playing him differently than a fictitious character?

JD: Yeah, it is different. I didn't have a whole lot to go on. There are a couple of documentaries, though the only time I'd seen him speak was in ***Glen or Glenda***. But you have to base it on something. Once I started, for some reason, I kept seeing Casey Kasem and Ronald Reagan. And the Tin Man from ***The Wizard of Oz.***

SA: Seriously?

JD: Yeah. It was those three guys combined with the stuff that I saw of Ed.

SA: Is there an obligation when you're playing it that you wouldn't have otherwise? The fact that there's a real guy out there?

JD: No, he's dead.

SA: Right.

JD: I mean, there's an obligation—you don't want to tarnish the guy, or fuck up his memory.

LK: In Ed Wood's case, it'd be very difficult.

JD: I wanted to try and make a guy that was a ball of energy, but also so sickly optimistic, you know, like Reagan.

SA: That's interesting.

JD: People could be dying all around the guy, but his little head would still be bobbing and weaving and smiling and shit, like he just doesn't see it. Insanely optimistic. [*He thinks a moment.*] But the only time I really got scared about being accurate was when Ed's widow, Kathy, showed up.

SA: Yeah.

JD: The initial meeting with her was trippy. It threw me a little bit.

LK: It was kind of a surprise on the set when she showed up.

JD: And I was in drag.

LK: That's right. You were in drag with bad lipstick.

JD: Bad lipstick and my mascara was running and my wig was kind of lopsided and she said, "Jesus, you look just like Eddie." She didn't bat an eye.

SA: That was a weird day.

LK: Kathy was on Hollywood Boulevard, just waiting for the bus. And she saw a production sign that said ED WOOD and she's like, "Oh, you know, I used to be married to that guy. Gotta go." So Scott ran after her.

SA: I reached her just as her bus was pulling up. And I told her it would be an honor for her to come visit. So I took her onto the set and Lisa Marie (in perfect Vampira makeup) came out of the shadows and stepped into the light. And Kathy's eyes pop and she goes, "Maila?!"

JD: Wow. She thought it was Vampira. Must've been overwhelming. Like a time machine. Vampira went through incredible surgery and is now 20 years old.

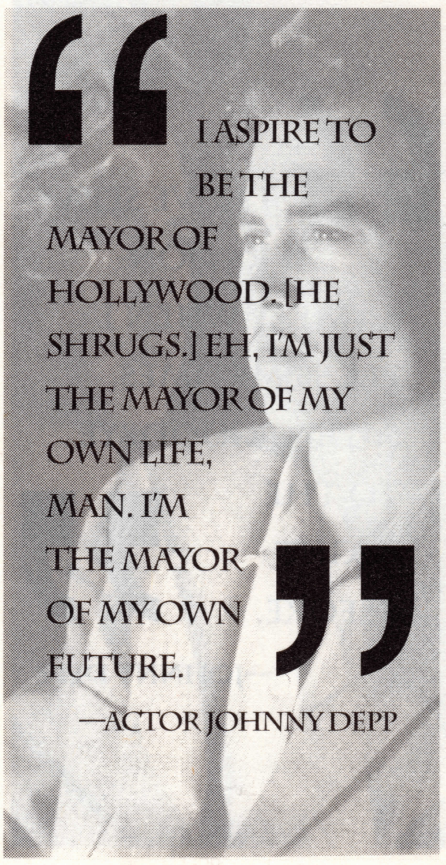
[*Larry picks up a bottle, then frowns.*]

LK: I'm reaching for an empty bottle now. That's how bad I am.

JD: You know what's incredible? I've had to pee since...at least at about 11:00 this morning.

LK: When we leave, don't say, "That goddamn Larry and Scott. They wouldn't let me piss."

JD: No, I'm gonna hang onto it. I have separation anxiety when I pee sometimes. Saying goodbye to the night before.



JD: So is it a disaster so far, our interview?

SA: We've never done this before. We don't know.

JD: I think it's good actually.

SA: [*riffling through his notes*] So what was it like when some of Ed's cronies showed up? Bob Burns? David Ward?

JD: Well, Bob Burns came on the set and brought the original flying saucers from ***Plan 9***.

LK: A man who actually had the foresight: "You know, I'm gonna keep these."

JD: Says a lot about a person.

LK: Just means his basement is full of a lot of things.

JD: He was cool, but he was the one that made me feel really good 'cause...he massaged me. [*giggling*] No, he made me feel really good because he watched us do a scene where I was directing—directing as Ed. So Bob came to me afterwards and said, "You know, it's really scary, because that's exactly what he was like."

SA: Whoa.

JD: Exactly. I was doing this kind of heightened reality. This larger version than what I assumed was real, and he said, "That's it, man, that's it. Ed was just moving all the time and he was talking really loud and energetic, just fucking excited about doing something." So I was kind of happy about that.

LK: What about David Ward?

JD: Oh, David Ward was killer. I loved him. He was hysterical, man. He had that kind of weird optimism.

SA: He was from the porno period.

JD: Yeah.

SA: The sad '60s. That's when he knew Ed.

JD: He was great. Really supportive. You see him dancing when I was doing the strip tease.

SA: Very prominently.

JD: He was in every angle.

LK: David Ward is a professional extra.

SA: He knows where to stand, how to hold a beer. He knows how you get in there.

JD: I remember I was moving that way, I was shaking it around, and I just remember David like he was, like almost coming onto me, and I thought, *How strange.*

SA: Getting in the spirit of things.

JD: Yeah, really.

[*The AD returns.*]

AD: Johnny, camera's ready.

[*Johnny leaves for a couple takes, then returns.*]

SA: David Ward was really funny. We were sitting with him, and Landau comes over. And he's like, "Martin Landau. I'm so excited to meet you. I know ***Sliver*** was a big bomb, but I liked it."

LK: Yeah, "I know you were just in the movie that was really crap, but forget about all that. Just put it all behind you."

SA: "I thought you were terrific."

JD: Oh, Jesus Christ.

LK: You know, there's a whole script based on David Ward. Ward was this guy who struggled for 20 years to get in SAG. It was one of those legendary unproduced scripts.

JD: I want to play David Ward.

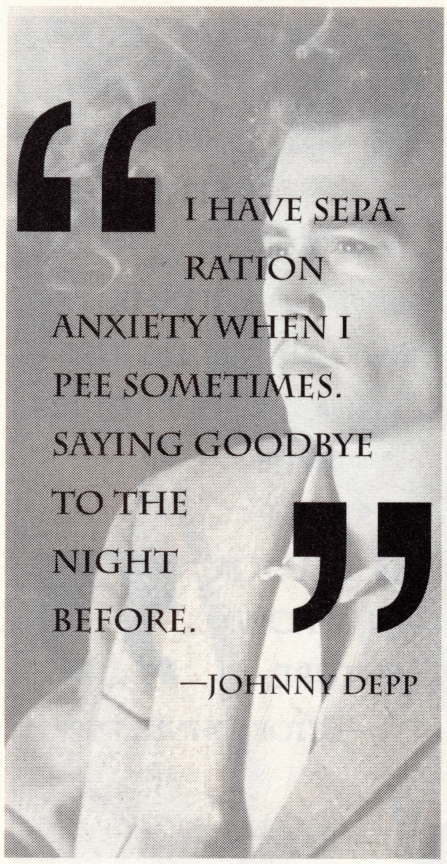
SA: And a fictitious version of Ed Wood shows up in the third act. But they chickened out—they changed all the names.

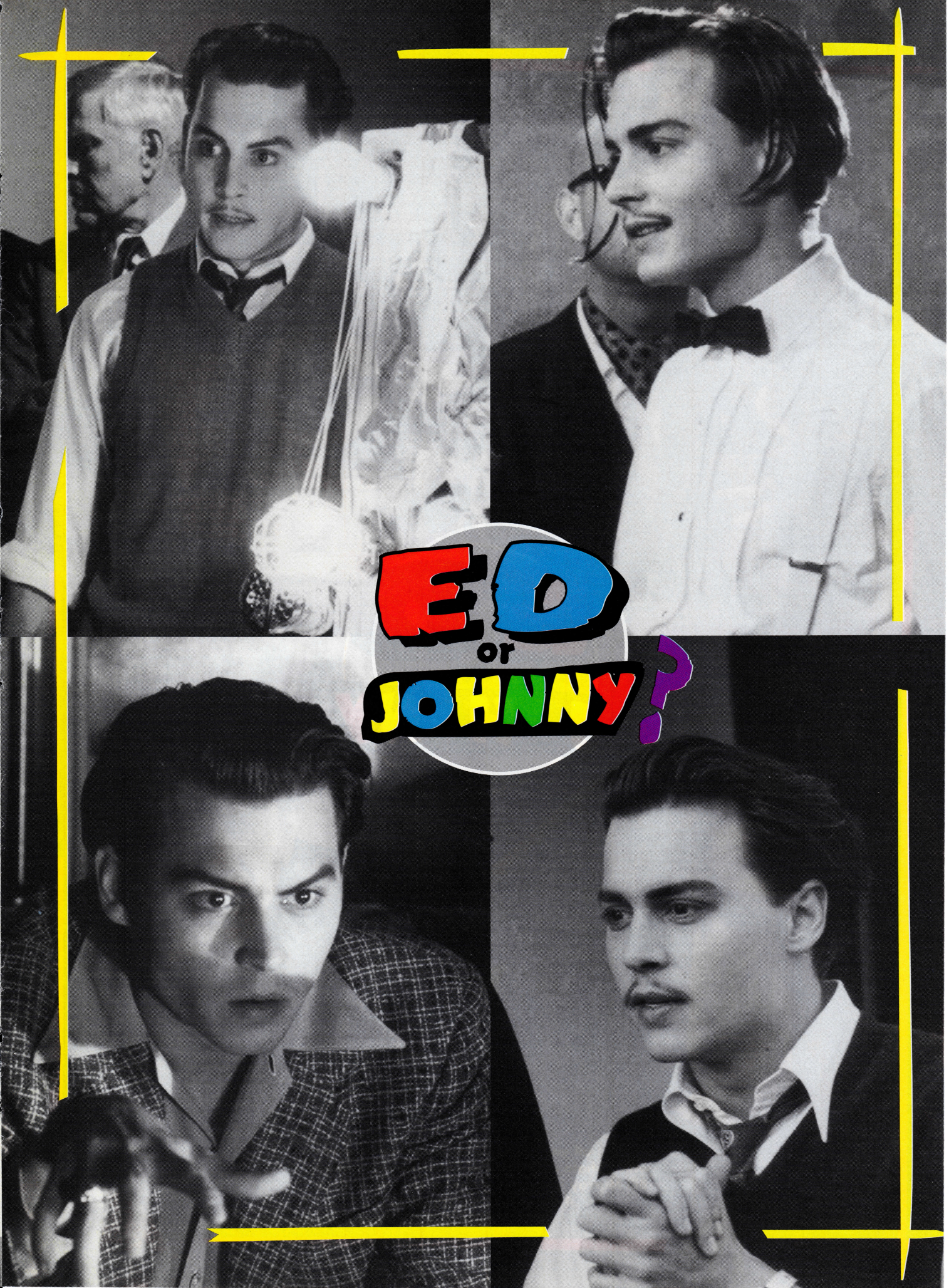
LK: They pull punches.

JD: Hey, anyone heard from Paul Marco?

SA: No.

LK: He left a message on my machine saying, "If you want to make a lot of money, call me back." But I decided I didn't really want to make a lot of money, so I didn't call him back.
SA: Larry takes the high ground.
JD: "If you want to make a lot of money"?!
SA: Paul's a man of mystery.
LK: Paul was actually the first guy that Tim really got into, because we gave Tim this British documentary, *The Incredibly Strange Film Show*, that has an interview with Paul. And there's that same kind of deluded optimism— "Gosh, I just love making these movies." Because Paul still believes, the same way Ed believed, that these films are great. So it really captured the spirit of our script early on.
SA: Funny and sad.
JD: Still, that hope that someday he was gonna—you know, he told me that he wanted to play himself.
SA: Yeah.
LK: When he was doing his cameo, he was wandering around, and he saw a trailer that said PAUL MARCO on the outside. And so he just walks in there, and starts kicking back and relaxing—
SA: Moving things around...
LK: And Max walks in. It's Max's trailer.
SA: Actor Max. Who plays the character "Paul Marco."
LK: And there was this big blowup. It was like, "No, this is my trailer." And finally, I think Denise DiNovi or somebody managed to find another trailer for Paul.
SA: I think he ended up with a bigger trailer than you.
JD: Give him anything. Give him anything. [*Johnny takes a bite of something, then grimaces.*]
JD: What is this? It's weird.
SA: Surimi—fake crab.
JD: You take a bite of it and it crunches and then the taste is like water. It's hemorrhoids. [*He dumps his food.*] Oh, I know what I was gonna say earlier.... When we were talking about playing Ed and I didn't want to tarnish his memory, do anything further than what had already been done. He'd been called the worst director in history, you know, made the worst films of all time, and all that. Well, I wanted to play him as what you guys had in mind initially, your vision of making him this sort of hero, in a weird way. How his friends had this strange belief in him and loved him. I wanted to go against all that "Golden Turkey Awards" shit that the Medved brothers said. Because I honestly believe if a guy, a director, or a writer, is doing their work, what is true to him, making his own vision, his own statement, who can judge that and say it's bad or good? It's just different. I really don't think that Ed was a bad director.
SA: Do you think it would have been any different if Ed had had more money?
JD: Absolutely. Sure. I think he did the best he could with what was available to him. You know, $30 can only go so far.
LK: The flying saucers were symbols for real special effects.
JD: Look at today. They make films for $100 million. And you give a nine-year-old kid a $100 million and say, "We're gonna take Arnold Schwarzenegger, this man here with the big muscles, and we're gonna give him a 100,000 pounds worth of explosives and some machine guns and shit. Now go ahead." It's like playing army in your backyard, only with a very expensive budget. A huge wallet. Anybody could do it, I think.
LK: Also, I find that what separates Ed's movies from the really bad films is that you can really feel that passion underneath. That's what's so great about them, is that you can tell that the people making them totally believe in what they're doing.
SA: His personality comes through.
LK: Half the time, you go the movie theater nowadays, and you pay $7.50, and there is no personality coming through. There is nothing at all.
JD: His acting in ***Glen or Glenda*** was really great. I wouldn't say it was bad. We talked about it as being bad earlier. It's not really bad acting, it's just sort of surreal. What's that one line? "My mind's in a muddle." His delivery was so—I mean, if you saw Christopher Walken do that, you'd say, "My God, he's a genius." Right? Fucking genius. So, I think Ed got the shit end of the stick. Because people were, for the most part, generally cheap. Somebody vomits their opinion and the rest of the people go, "I agree with him. It's terrible. That's all."
LK: When we were writing the script, it was very important that we didn't make fun of Ed.
SA: Wait a minute—
[*Everyone looks up. Actor Vincent D'Onofrio, who in an odd coincidence happens to be in* **Ed Wood**, *has unexpectedly walked in.*]
JD: Hey, you. You know Vincent D'Onofrio?
[*Everyone mumbles hellos. We all shake.*]
JD: Orson Welles. How are you, brother?
VINCENT D'ONOFRIO: [*confused*] Okay...it's a bit overwhelming.
JD: We're doing an interview for FILM THREAT! These guys wrote ***Ed Wood***.
VD: Okay, then go ahead. I wanna hear some shit. Come on.
JD: Yeah, let's continue.
LK: We were talking about the fact that we weren't making fun of Ed. For instance, the cross-dressing. We tried not to make it campy. Once an actor puts on a dress, it's kind of hard not to become Milton Berle.
JD: No, in a weird way, it's almost the most normal that Ed was. I felt he was most comfortable when he was in drag, and the rest of it was a bit heightened.
SA: In the film, you're very natural when you're in a dress. You come down in those scenes.
JD: Yeah. The other times he's kind of jumping out of his skin.
[*Scott hands Vincent the list of prepared questions.*]
SA: Here, let's give Vincent the questions. The guest interviewer.
[*Vincent isn't sure about this. But he decides to play along.*]
VD: That brings up an interesting question. "Have you heard from any fetish groups or publications?"
JD: Yeah. Before we started the movie, I got a package from Miss Vera's Finishing School in New York City.
LK: Wow.
JD: And what they do is, they teach men to become transvestites. How to behave like women.
VD: What did they say in the letter?
JD: It was a bunch of stuff. Literature, photographs, and the letter was basically, "We heard you were doing this film and we're very excited about the possibility of you coming here. And we could help you out, help you become a woman."
SA: That was good of them.
JD: And I wrote them back and said, "I need no help becoming a woman, because I am one." [*He laughs.*] So, no, actually, I did think about it. I pondered the thought of going there to kind of investigate what they were doing.
SA: You did a fine job. In a dress, you were a dead ringer for Claudia Schiffer.
JD: Nah. I thought I was the ugliest woman I'd ever seen in my life. But you know, it's interesting that you mentioned Claudia Schiffer, because I followed her around for months. I stalked her, and I got in trouble with that guy. What's his name?
LK: David Copperfield.
JD: Yeah, that guy. The magician. He kept making me disappear. You know, suddenly these pigeons would appear out of my...
[*Everyone laughs. Vincent looks for another question.*]
VD: Speaking of exploiting your friends...
JD: Nice segue.
VD: Did Ed know that he was exploiting all his friends?
JD: No. I think that it was his destiny to meet Bela Lugosi. And he saw an opportunity that reared its head, and he took the ball and ran with it. I think that he tried to make everything good, tried to get them all gigs and make them all happy, and make them famous, and he believed that. He believed that he was going to make them all famous.




ED
or
JOHNNY?



Okay, all you Ed Wood buffs, can you figure which photo is 1) Wrestler/actor Tor Johnson; 2) Bill Murray in a wig; 3) Martin Landau as Bela; 4) The vivacious Vampira?

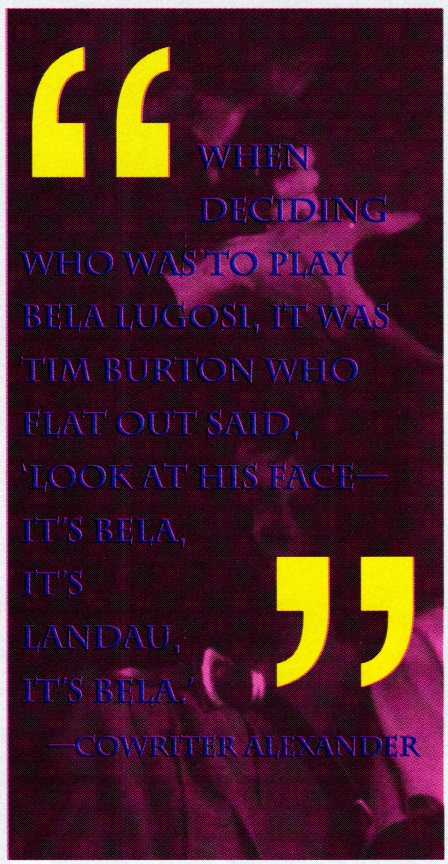
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41

were basically "Wouldn't this be hysterical, the guys who wrote ***Problem Child*** and the guy who directed ***Hudson Hawk*** making a movie about the worst filmmaker of all time." They wrote a ten-page treatment for Michael, who, after reading it, finally got the idea for the picture. Michael in turn took the treatment to his ***Heathers*** producer, Denise DiNovi, to see if she and Tim Burton would be interested in producing this picture for them. Denise was a little baffled by this so she passed it along to Tim, who, according to Scott said, "Yes, this is great and I'm looking forward to directing this movie." Denise had to inform him that it was for him to produce, and Michael was going to direct it. Tim then put his foot down and said, "No, Michael is going to produce it and I'm going to direct it."

Working 14-hour days, seven days a week, Scott and Larry punched out the script in record time. Although the script came in at 148 pages, somewhat epic as far as scripts are concerned, Tim loved it and went ahead and shot the first draft. Scott explains, "We were scared. We finally got the script down to 148 pages and we were saying that it's still too long, but we just got to give it to him. There was a bit of a mercenary attitude behind the script in the fact that we were trying to appeal to Tim's instincts. He's a very personal filmmaker and everything with him is on a gut level—he either responds to it emotionally or he doesn't get it at all. We knew we had one shot, and so we tried to put in scenes that would work for him on an iconographic level or would parallel his relationships. We certainly tried to stress the relationship between Ed and Bela because it was so reminiscent of Tim's relationship with Vincent Price."

TIM'S TAKE

Obviously everything didn't go as planned when shooting began. Tim's take on certain scenes was far from Scott and Larry's. "What's funny is that a few things blew up in our faces," Scott explains. "One was a total kiss-ass scene in the script, which will not be in the movie, where Ed and Bela were riding through a cemetery at night. Bela's dressed up for Halloween and his cap is flapping through the wind, and they're drinking and running through tombstones. We had written it really visually—we had oil wells pumping in the background, it was all very visual, very elaborate, and we could even picture the music playing just like a Tim Burton moment, and everyone was saying that it was such a Tim Burton moment. They drove down to Long Beach, found a cemetery with oil wells pumping in the background, they lit this whole thing, and Tim did two shots and said, 'Okay, let's go home.' That was it! We envisioned this as a major set piece in the movie. Clearly, he just wasn't responding to it. He did the two shots, he went home and that was the first scene that was cut when they started editing the movie. In some ways you can't second-guess someone."



LANDAU BECOMES BELA

When deciding who was to play Bela Lugosi, it was Tim Burton who spent the night brainstorming and came up with Martin Landau's name. According to Scott, Tim flat out said, "Look at his face—it's Bela, it's Landau, it's Bela."

BLACK-AND-WHITE OR COLOR?

At this point the ***Ed Wood*** crew went to Rick Baker to do a makeup test on Landau. Larry explains their first encounter with the world-renowned makeup genius: "Rick Baker designed a whole Bela makeup thing for Landau, and we shot a makeup test, which was shot in color. We got back the dailies and they looked great, they looked amazing, but we kept on saying something was missing, and it dawned on us that none of us had ever seen a color photograph of Bela Lugosi. I think it was from that moment on that Tim started saying, 'Black-and-white, black-and-white is the only way to do this movie. These are black-and-white people.'" Scott goes on to add that "stylistically it would allow an overlap between the movies that Ed was making and Ed's life, otherwise the movie would be bouncing back and forth between color and black-and-white."

How did Columbia Pictures react to the fact that Tim wanted to shoot it in black-and-white? "They were vomiting," explains Scott. "They have contracts when movies get made and their contracts said color. They were saying, 'Look, we can't get our cable money, we can't get our foreign video money, we won't be able to exploit the movie in a lot of markets if it's in black-and-white.'"

THEY DID IT TIM'S WAY!

But did any of this stop Mr. Nonconformist himself, Tim Burton? Of course not! Larry explains that at the time Tim was basically saying, "'I don't care. It makes me happy—why can't I do it?' He refused to make it in color. The studio was saying, 'How about if we shot it on a color negative and released it here in black-and-white, but then later on if the film is not that successful we could make it a color video?' Tim said no way."

A LOW-BUDGET BURTON MOVIE

By now Columbia was backing out of the project and ***Ed Wood*** was being put into turnaround. Everyone in town had a couple of days to put together their offers for the next Tim Burton "Black and White" film. Scott states that "Denise DiNovi put together a locked budget saying, 'We could make the movie for $19 million, you can't touch the script, you have no control over the film, you can have it next summer, who wants it?' A number of studios stepped up, and Disney offered the best deal." Larry explains that "Tim does every-



Okay, all you Ed Wood buffs Part 2. Figure out which photo is 1) A cool, atmospheric set; 2) Sarah Jessica Parker; 3) Tor carrying an octopus; and 4) Bill Murray in a wig.

thing by gut instinct. With this movie he was really trying to get away from the big-budget-type ***Batman*** movies, where you have 14,000 people telling you what to do. Before he began he said, 'I wonder if I'm a crybaby. Can I make a movie like this after spending $70 million on movies, can I just go and make a $19 million movie?' It sounds like a lot of money to us, but it was one of those things where he was asking whether he could do it without some of the frills."

TIM DOES IT "ED WOOD" STYLE

So Tim sets out to make his film in the vein that Ed Wood would have done it in. Scott talks about what life was like before shooting began. "A location scout would come in and say, 'I think we're going to need this many sets for this location and it's going to cost this much money,' and Tim would say, 'No, it's too much, we're doing it Ed Wood style.' They'd say we need 50 extras that day and Tim would say 'No, we only need 20.' "

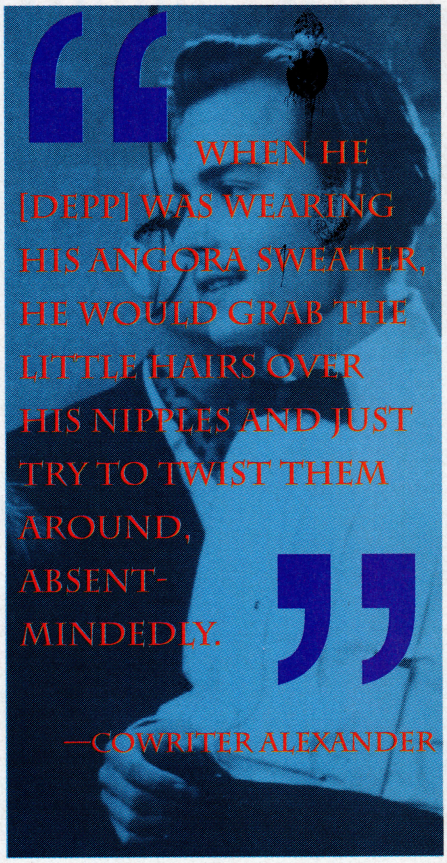
RE-CREATING BAD—ON PURPOSE

Don't expect to see lush, elaborate Tim Burton sets in this film. Larry explains "the art director thought he was working on a Tim Burton movie so all of the sets he designed were done to look really cool and neat, and Tim would just go through and say lose the plant, lose this, lose that. And when you got back to it, it was an Ed Wood set. It was two plants and a couch." Scott goes on to say, "In particular, when you see the movie, a couple of Ed's apartments in the film are really absurd-looking because they look like Ed Wood sets. They're so cheap-looking."

DRESSING UP JOHNNY'

We've all seen Johnny Depp's charm shine through in ***Edward Scissorhands*** and ***What's Eating Gilbert Grape***, but can he bring that humble, sincere quality to the role of a cross-dressing anti-auteur? Scott believes so. "Johnny's incredible sweetness makes this movie really accessible. You'll really like it, Johnny's such a good guy."

But Depp in drag? "The cross-dressing is unusual in this movie, whereas in most movies it's cute and funny and corky, in this movie it's played totally straight," Scott says. "I don't know if it's ever been presented this way in a movie before. It's just Johnny sitting in his apartment, drinking a beer, and he just happens to be dressed as a women, without commenting on it. It's not even slightly sexualized, and it's not Robin Williams being cute either." Hey, and how could he play it wrong? When you have Kate Moss and Winona Ryder giving you pointers, dressing as a woman is probably as easy as directing a bad movie.



During preproduction, word around La-La land had rumors of Depp doing research for his role by wearing women's clothing out and about. Scott explains, "He was trying it out. He said that when he was wearing his angora sweater he would grab the little hairs over his nipples and just try to twist them around, absentmindedly, while he was pacing around." Larry continues "that Ed Wood felt so comfortable wearing women's clothing that Johnny wanted to get to the point where he felt comfortable. Also, Ed was very big on not trying to be a woman, he was trying to be himself in women's clothing. So Johnny wanted to be able to still do his walk and not be swoshy. So I think Johnny was really trying out his heels—I don't think he was wearing women's underwear. He really had to get used to walking in heels, which is not an easy thing to do."

We all know that Johnny's a very versatile thespian, but can he truly strut his stuff in pumps? According to Scott, Johnny was capable of everything. "An amazing moment is when he does the scene from ***Glen or Glenda*** with Ed walking down the street, window shopping in drag, and he's walking like a man—like a man who doesn't even know he's dressed like a woman. It's so funny because he looks completely natural about it, he's completely unaware of the fact that he's dressed as a woman. Johnny really nailed that."

DRONES OF WOOD-AHOLICS

Little does Hollywood know, but there are people out there who actually like seeing Ed Wood flicks. Larry explains, "I think there's this whole army of Wood fanatics, there's this underground army flying under the studio radar. They don't realize how many people out there went to ***Plan 9 From Outer Space*** every weekend, how many people go to *Fangoria* conventions. I think there's an audience out there that they are unaware of."

ODE TO ED

Will America, and the world, understand this film? Will they take it into their hearts and call it their own? And what do Scott and Larry want America to get out of this picture? All Scott wants his audience to do is root for a guy who went against everything America stands for. But Larry feels it's a little more than that: "I think that Ed is really symbolic of the American dream in a sense that sure he's a cross-dresser, sure he's a freak, but he did it his way. He fought for what he believed in, and I agree with Scott—if you can get an audience to root for a guy who is sitting there in an angora sweater, directing an aging heroin addict, and get the audience to realize that these people are lovable, that they're not really freaks, they're normal people, then you've done your job. They just need to be understood."

Hell, Orson Welles spent his entire career fighting the Hollywood system, and he didn't even wear a dress.